

February 1, 2007

Press Release | Contact: Danielle Langone (202) 225-6416

WASHINGTON, DC—U.S. Representatives Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) and Greg Walden (R-Hood River) enlisted 94 fellow members of Congress to join them in sending a letter to leaders in the House and on the Appropriations Committee urging them to include language to reauthorize and fund a one-year extension of the county payments program in the Emergency Supplemental bill. The county payments program, also known as the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000, expired last year and must be reauthorized.

Last year, the county payments program provided nearly \$280 million for Oregon counties for services like schools, roads and law enforcement. Counties receiving funding under the program have a high proportion of federally owned lands. Prior to the enactment of the county payments program, they had received a percentage of receipts from timber harvests, which fluctuated from year to year. However, harvest levels decreased precipitously in the late 1990s due to changes in federal forest policy. In 2000, Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act to help stabilize these payments and ensure proper funding for vital county services.

DeFazio and Walden have also introduced a bill that would reauthorize the county payments program for an additional seven years, HR 17.

The text of the letter follows.

January 30, 2007

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Boehner
Minority Leader
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Room H-218, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Colleagues:

As you develop the Emergency Supplemental (Supplemental) to fund vital government programs we implore you to include in it language to reauthorize and fully fund an extension of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-393). This program, and funding for it, is critical to the survivability of over 775 rural counties and 4,400 schools near national forests in 42 states across the country.

P.L. 106-393 expired at the end of September 2006, and if not reauthorized and funded, will result in a substantial and excruciating funding cut for rural counties across America. This act was passed by Congress to provide funding to offset the loss of revenues to counties resulting from severely reduced federal timber sales. The law has kept schools open, roads maintained, search and rescue missions operating, and many other essential local services afloat. The federal government made a pact with rural communities nearly a century ago when it established the federal timber sale program which provided counties a portion of revenue from federal timber sales.

Harvest levels on federal lands have been significantly reduced over the past decade by changes in federal forest policy. In 2000, Congress demonstrated its commitment to continue the pact they made with rural counties by passing the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act. To not reauthorize and fund the Act would break the federal government's pledge to these rural communities all across the country.

We have attached a copy of a letter sent by the National Governors Association to the House and Senate leadership in September of 2006 urging support for reauthorization of this program. Clearly, a law important enough to be supported by the association representing all 50 governors deserves the full attention of the Congress and favorable action in the first hours of the 110th Congress. The Emergency Supplemental would be the last opportunity to address this critical issue before counties have to start implementing cuts to schools and services. A number of counties around the country have already begun sending out pink slips notifying employees of potential lay-offs. Without reauthorization of and funding for the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, the predicament will be an emergency without rescue for hundreds and hundreds of rural counties across America.

Thank you for your serious consideration of including language to reauthorize and fully fund P.L. 106-393 in the forthcoming Emergency Supplemental.

Best regards,

/s/

Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress

Greg Walden
Member of Congress

Click [here](#) for a PDF copy of the preceding letter as well as the letter from the National Governors Association sent to House and Senate leadership in support of reauthorization.